



Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NAVY RELEASES FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT; FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

The Navy has released a Final Environmental Assessment (EA) and a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) has been issued after evaluating the potential environmental effects that may result from the transition of Expeditionary Electronic Attack (VAQ) squadrons at Naval Air Station (NAS) Whidbey Island, Oak Harbor, Washington, from the aging EA-6B Prowler aircraft to the newer EA-18G Growler aircraft. The Navy released the Draft EA on July 27, 2012, and received public comments on the document from July 27 to August 31, 2012.

Because the Navy finds that implementing the proposed action of the transition of Expeditionary Electronic Attack (VAQ) squadrons at Naval Air Station (NAS) Whidbey Island will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, the Navy has determined that the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

The EA, including the FONSI, can be viewed and downloaded at:

- Naval Facilities Engineering Command Northwest web site:
https://portal.navfac.navy.mil/portal/page/portal/navfac/NAVFAC_WW_PP/NAVFAC_EFANW_PP

A printed copy and an electronic copy of the Final EA have been placed in the Oak Harbor Library, 1000 SE Regatta Dr., Oak Harbor, WA; the La Conner Regional Library, 614 Morris St., La Conner, WA; the Coupeville Library, 788 Alexander St., Coupeville, WA and the Anacortes Public Library, 1220 10th St., Anacortes, WA.

The EA analyzed the potential effects of the Navy proposal to transition the VAQ squadrons at NAS Whidbey Island from the EA-6B Prowler to the EA-18G Growler in the 2012-2014 timeframe. The proposed action includes:

- Retaining the existing Expeditionary VAQ mission capabilities at NAS Whidbey Island.
- Performing the in-place transition of three existing Expeditionary VAQ squadrons home based at NAS Whidbey Island from the older EA-6B aircraft to the newer EA-18G aircraft.
- Potentially relocating one Reserve Expeditionary VAQ EA-6B squadron from Joint Base Andrews to NAS Whidbey Island and transitioning from the older EA-6B aircraft to the newer EA-18G aircraft.
- Adding up to 11 EA-18G aircraft to the Fleet Replacement Squadron (FRS) at NAS Whidbey Island to support the Expeditionary VAQ squadrons.
- Modifying certain facilities at Ault Field to provide functional support to the new aircraft type and a modest increase in personnel to support the Expeditionary VAQ squadrons.

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EXPEDITIONARY VAQ EA/FONSI -2-2-2-2

Under the proposed action, each Expeditionary VAQ squadron would increase by one additional aircraft. Each existing Expeditionary VAQ EA-6B squadron consists of four aircraft; but after transition, the Expeditionary VAQ EA-18G squadrons would consist of five aircraft each. In addition, the existing FRS (VAQ-129) would receive additional aircraft to support the Expeditionary VAQ squadrons, with a proportional reduction of EA-6B aircraft at the FRS.

The primary types of mission training and readiness requirements for the EA-18G Growler are nearly identical to those for the EA-6B Prowler. There would be no change in the training program that would cause changes to the types of flight operations flown by the current Expeditionary VAQ squadrons (arrivals, departures, or pattern operations); the locations of flight operations (flight tracks over land or water); or the current ratio of daytime to nighttime flight operations at Ault Field.

There are two distinct components to the VAQ community: the Carrier Air Wing (CVW) Fleet VAQ squadrons and the Expeditionary VAQ squadrons. Each has the same mission but they differ in where they deploy (onboard aircraft carriers for the Fleet VAQ squadrons vs. land based VAQ squadrons). Expeditionary VAQ squadrons do not deploy on aircraft carriers and therefore are not required to conduct field carrier landing practice (FCLP) at either Ault Field or OLF Coupeville.

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